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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the University of Melbourne (Australia) Library's response to the changing organizational environment. The first section provides background on the university and library, including the creation of a new position, Research Consultant, that was designed in response to concerns expressed by academics that the library was not meeting the information or research needs of the postgraduate community. The School of Graduate Studies is described in the second section, including data on postgraduate enrollment by course level, mode, and country. The following key responsibilities of the Research Consultant are summarized in the third section: provide support to postgraduate students; coordinate the matching of postgraduate information needs with the appropriate library service; act as a liaison with the University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association to ensure that research and information needs of postgraduates are met; strengthen the communication between the library and the School of Graduate Studies; and contribute to the international profile of the school. The fourth section discusses information literacy programs, including development of online bibliographic instruction tutorials and partnership of library staff and academics in developing World Wide Web-based courses. (Contains 10 references.) (MES)

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University of Melbourne Library Meeting the Challenges of Providing Information Literacy in a Networked Environment

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A.L. Van Wesermael

Paper

Introduction:

Among the many interpretations of the term information literacy, the American Library Association statement provides an authoritative description:

> To be information literate, a person must be able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed...Ultimately information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organised, how to find information, and how to use information in such away that others can learn from them. (cited in (Bruce 1997, p.27)).

While researchers and practitioners may debate the concept of information literacy, (Breivik and Gee 1989; Snavely and Cooper 1997; Walton, Day, and Edwards 1996), its importance to learning in the academic sector is not disputed.

Bruce states that:

> the changes in the world of information, which are present in the microcosm of scholarly community, need to be accounted for in both research and teaching-learning contexts. The aim is to ensure relevant and timely research outcomes and graduates who are able to contend with the world of information and

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independently for the higher education community. (Bruce 1997, p.8)

At the University of Melbourne Library, librarians are developing an understanding of the meaning of information literacy. For some, however, information literacy is a term which can be interchanged with the terms bibliographic instruction (BI), library skills or library orientation programs. Changes in technology are altering the way in which our students and academic staff are accessing information. As discussed in Rader's article (Rader 1995) Desk top access, the immediacy of electronic information, the range of sources now available via the web and independence from traditional library services, require a different approach by librarians when designing library skills programs. In addition to the developments of information technology, the concept of life long learning is becoming a critical issue at our University. The librarians are charged with the design of library programs which are underpinned by the concept of information literacy.

The following paper outlines the University of Melbourne Library's response to the changing organisational environment and of realigning one of its services. Creating a new position Research Consultant is discussed in the context of change and the opportunities and challenges that the developing information technologies bring to the design and delivery of information literacy programs in a networked environment.

Background

The University of Melbourne is one of the oldest and one of the most prestigious universities in Australia. Its long held traditions, though, are being tested. The Vice Chancellor is determined that the University be well placed to take advantage of new opportunities that may develop through internationalisation of academic institutions and programs. Furthermore, the changes in government funding require universities to seek financial support from other sectors. This means increased competition among universities and other tertiary institutions.

As the Library is part of the University structure it is not immune to the change of priorities, funding difficulties and shift in service orientation. It was during this period of transition that the Vice Principal, Information (who heads Information Technology, Multimedia and the Library) took the opportunity to strategically align the Library with the Vice Chancellor's vision of a "superb campus-based research and teaching university". (University of Melbourne 1998, p.23)

The creation of a new position, Research Consultant, was designed in response to the concerns expressed by academics that the Library was not meeting the information or research needs of the postgraduate community. The Library had a credibility problem among certain sectors of the postgraduate and research community. Dramatic cuts in the serials budget, introduction of inter library loan fees, communication issues and few library skills programs designed specifically for postgraduate students fostered the view that the Library did not understand the information needs of postgraduates.

It was within this environment that the Vice Principal, Information sought out the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies (the School) and put forward a proposition that an experienced librarian based in the School may benefit the postgraduate community. The creation of the position was part of the Library's mission to ensure that its resources and services were strategically placed to meet the emerging research and information needs of the university community. The placement of the Research Consultant in the School indicated the Dean's commitment to collaborate with the Library in targeting its services and programs to postgraduate students.

The School of Graduate Studies

The Graduate Centre, established in 1994, provides a focal point for the 9,000- strong

postgraduate student community. Computer labs, study rooms, meeting rooms, a Resource Room, Publishing Centre, carrels for writing up theses and a café/bistro are available for the postgraduate students. Co-managing the building are the School of Graduate Studies staff, the University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association (UMPA) Executive, and staff employed by UMPA. Although the roles of the groups may differ, commitment to excellence in research and quality support services is shared.

In the Australian context, the School holds a unique position. It is responsible for administering research higher degrees for PhD and Research Masters in Science and Engineering. In addition, the School plays a lead role in policy development, provides advice and information for supervisors and postgraduate coordinators, provides short skills programs and academic programs for postgraduate students, awards grants and plays a role in organizing cultural and social programs.

In 1998, the total enrolled student population was 34,443. Of this total, 26 per cent were postgraduate students (or 9,077 students). Within the postgraduate cohort, 6.75% or 613 were international students. The tables below illustrate the trends in full time postgraduate enrolments over a three-year period and the growth in international postgraduate student enrolments.

Table 1: Postgraduate Enrolments by Course Level and Mode 1996 - 1998

	1996				1997				1998			
Course Level	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**	**% of Total**	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**	**% of Total**	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**	**% of Total**
Higher Doctorates	30	77	107	1%	93	87	180	2%	133	84	217	2%
PhDs	1298	576	1874	21%	1311	669	1980	22%	1344	696	2040	22%
Masters (Research & Course)	677	2368	3045	33%	761	2608	3369	37%	784	2801	3585	39%
Other PGs (diplomas,etc)	838	3264	4102	45%	803	2815	3618	40%	780	2455	3235	36%
Total	**2843**	**6285**	**9128**	**100%**	**2968**	**6179**	**9147**	**100%**	**3041**	**6036**	**9077**	**100%**

**Figures supplied by The Academic Planning Support Unit, University of Melbourne*

Table 2: International Postgraduate Students by Country: 1997 - 1998

Country	**Year 1997**	**% of international enrolments**	**Year 1998**	**% of international enrolments**
Africa	30	5%	29	5%
Americas	27	5%	37	6%
Asia - total	344	61%	419	68%
Europe	33	6%	37	6%
Oceania	17	3%	27	4%
no information	111	20%	64	10%
Total	**562**	**100%**	**613**	**100%**

**Figures supplied by The Academic Planning Support Unit, University of Melbourne*

The position and key responsibilities

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The role of the Research Consultant encompasses the following key elements:

- Provide high level, customer focussed support to postgraduate students.
- Coordinate the matching of postgraduate information needs with the appropriate Library service.
- Liaise with the University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association (UMPA) to ensure that research and information needs of postgraduates are met.
- Strengthen the communication between the Library and the School of Graduate Studies.
- Contribute to the international profile of the School.

It is now fifteen months since I started in the position. During this time I have delivered seminars, lab-based classes and individual consultations, and conducted workshops in country-based campuses to over 2,000 postgraduates. In the first six months of establishing my role, I spent time visiting faculties, getting to know the key players in the School and UMPA, meeting with library colleagues, and delivering basic skills classes for the postgraduate community.

Visiting academic departments provided valuable insights into the kind of support that was available to postgraduate students, which varied greatly even within faculties, and uneven awareness of the Library's resources and services. Often the visits generated requests for classes, and in some cases supervisors referred their students for individual consultations.

Developing links with the Postgraduate Association and staff of the Association resulted in increased involvement in their postgraduate programs, including residential workshops in country campuses. Close physical proximity to the Association is an important factor in maintaining a strong relationship.

GradFlash, a weekly electronic email bulletin provided by the School, has become an essential communication vehicle for me to advertise and promote new resources, trials of databases, updates on bibliographic software issues and library programs. At least 3,000 postgraduates subscribe to this service. Many postgraduates rely on the email service for information about scholarships, forthcoming programs, conferences and events. The service provides a sense of community which is particularly important for students living outside metropolitan Melbourne, who may at times feel isolated from university life.

The first library skills classes that I conducted, in my role as Research Consultant generated interest. But it was not until I had met students on an individual basis that I began to see common threads of concern and ways in which I might address those issues. Initially students who made appointments to see me and attended several of my classes were predominantly, mature aged students who were returning to study after many years. The new electronic environment overwhelmed these students. Many were frustrated with their inability to access their email, let alone search databases. Such concerns were not limited to a particular faculty make but across most faculties - Economics & Commerce, Medicine, Arts and Education.

At a more fundamental level though, postgraduate students were seeking a staff member who was accessible, responsive to their queries, able to help them sort out basic technical issues and who empathised with their problems of being remote users. As I am an "on-campus remote user" (Cooper et al. 1998, p.43) I am dependent on the university network for access to the internally hosted databases and externally sourced databases. Demonstrating the ease-of-access to information to a postgraduate student who already lacks confidence in using databases becomes a "PR problem" when the system goes down. As I do not have access to the Library's vast printed reference and general collections, reliable access to the university network is crucial for me to carry out effective class instruction and individual consultations with postgraduate students.

My experience, then, of working in the School, has made me aware of technological barriers that impede a postgraduate student's seamless access to networked information, and the need

for library staff to examine issues from a postgraduate perspective. Success of library programs is dependent on collaboration among library, IT staff and academics. Such a revelation, though, is not new. The literature over the past several years confirms my experience (Cooper et al. 1998; Herrington 1998; Sloan 1998; Walton, Day, and Edwards 1996).

Working towards Information literacy programs

Although there are difference in the interpretation of information literacy (Bruce 1997; Snavely and Cooper 1997; Walton, Day, and Edwards 1996), library practitioners are seizing the opportunity to work with colleagues, IT professionals and academic staff in developing programs that are more meaningful to the students. The sophistication and flexibility of the technology make it possible to design and deliver online instruction programs to students available at their time and point of need.

At the University of Melbourne early developments of online tutorials were primarily bibliographic instruction programs. One example of a web based bibliographic instruction tutorial is ***ARIADNE***. This was the first of the interactive web based programs which provided self-paced bibliographic and book and journal citation instruction to first year undergraduate Arts students. The project was the result of collaboration with the Multimedia Education Unit and the Faculty of Arts. This program is now being updated and its new format will cater to a wider student audience.

In response to the Vice Chancellor's vision for faculties to develop multimedia learning programs more academic staff are now involved in developing web-based courses. There is ongoing discussion as to how the courses will not only cater to the different learning styles but also encourage students to develop information literacy skills. These developments are an encouraging sign that the University is aware of the importance of equipping students with skills for life long learning. The involvement of librarians in curriculum design is important for long term survival of the Library. Two current examples of are library staff working in partnership with academics in developing web-based courses are the ***Researching History*** project and ***The Virtual Postgraduate Library: an Internet-based Interactive Research Site.***

The History Department, in collaboration with the Library is developing a web based interactive module for undergraduate students. The program, ***Researching History***, will be trialled in three history subjects: ***Historical Theory and Research, Hitler's Germany*** and ***Europe in the Age of Total War***. The program is designed to improve students' search strategies in the use of historical sources and correct use of citations. An important aspect of the project for the History Liaison Librarian is the opportunity to work with academics and IT specialists in developing a subject-based online learning package in which students gain information literacy skills. As a result of such collaboration the invaluable learning opportunities for the Library staff member concerned cannot be underestimated.

The Virtual Postgraduate Library: an Internet-based Interactive Research Site a collaborative venture with the Library, the Department of Criminology, Economics and Commerce Faculty and the School of Graduate Studies, is not part of an assessable subject like the ***Researching History*** project. The Project brief was based on experiences of a senior academic working with postgraduates undertaking research in the Department of Criminology and my experience of delivering library programs to postgraduates. It is our belief that information literacy is essential for postgraduate students, both in carrying out research at the university and developing life long evaluative skills.

In the Project submission the senior lecturer wrote:

> ..."Working with postgraduates, academics and library staff have found that some postgraduates have limited skills in identifying and obtaining relevant research materials, whether electronic or on paper, while other postgraduates waste time using inefficient search strategies. The problem is becoming more critical as

> postgraduates are working under pressure to complete their candidature. The increasing complexity and array of electronic resources available via the Internet, further compounds the problem of postgraduates knowing which databases to use. This project will complement the Library's program of information literacy classes and the individual consultations for postgraduate students" (Tait 1999, p.3)

This project will develop an Internet based 'pathway' for students undertaking postgraduate studies in the disciplines of Criminology and Economics & Commerce. Features of ***The Virtual Postgraduate Library*** will include:

- A set of online guides and fact sheets for databases which will advise and direct students in the effective use of electronic resources. Library staff working in consultation with postgraduate students and academic staff in the disciplines of Economics & Commerce and Criminology will compile the guides.
- A system of interactive "mentors" to channel and respond to postgraduate enquiries. These mentors will list the answers to frequently asked questions, provide general tips/tutorials and host forums which will monitored by information librarians. Questions which are outside the expertise of librarians will be directed to the relevant department/individual. For example, issues relating to IT, setting up computers at home and off-site access will be referred to the Help Desk staff at ITS.
- 24-hour access to the full range of information resources available on the library web site. These may include, for example, incorporating password access to databases which currently require intervention of a library staff member to issue the needed password.
- Topic forums hosted by postgraduates writing theses will promote student-student dialogue.

In June two of members of the Project team carried out a survey via the Library's web site to determine postgraduates' information priorities. The questionnaire collected information about course enrollment, level of research, where students access the Internet, recent library activity, qualitative evaluations of recently used library web sites and usefulness of the proposed Project. The responses, while not significant numerically, revealed overwhelming support for improved online access to abstracting services and full text articles, library skill tutorials and web-based access to librarians. The feedback will be used to develop modules in priority of need as indicated by the survey results.

Conclusion

Advances in technology, the access to information from the desktop at time and point of need are changes that require librarians rethink their information literacy strategies. Universities are promulgating the notion of life long learning and the necessity for graduating students to be equipped with information and literacy skills. At the University of Melbourne librarians are coming to terms with the differences between information literacy and bibliographic instruction and library skills programs. The changes are reflected in the collaborative web based courses that are being developed.

Adapting to the changing demands and information needs of postgraduate students has made me aware of the importance for librarians to be seen as positive change agents in the academic community. The challenge is to keep pace with change and to provide needed support, whether in person or online.

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